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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000406

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/26/2017

TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: CUBAN POLICE VIOLENTLY STOP PROTEST

REF: HAVANA 397

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly : For reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) Summary: On May 25 former political prisoner Jorge Luis Garcia Perez ("Antunez") led a march in the city of Placetas, province of Santa Clara, that was to culminate in a symbolic funeral for Pedro Luis Boitel, a student leader who died in 1972 as the result of a hunger strike protesting the Castro regime. Police wielding clubs broke up the march and detained 25 people. Five others were detained on their way to the protest. All were released after several hours without charges, although police threatened two women with prosecution for resisting arrest. Two protesters were checked at a hospital for possible head injuries and were released. End summary

¶2. (SBU) Antunez told Poloff that on the evening of May 24 people had gathered in his home in Placetas to participate in a march the next day to mark the anniversary of the death of Pedro Luis Boitel. Boitel was a student leader who died on May 25, 1972 after a 53 day hunger strike to protest the Castro government. Police on May 24 detained five other persons on their way to the house of Antunez.

¶3. (SBU) At 4:00 PM on May 25 the group left the home of Antunez and started a march that was to culminate in a symbolic funeral for Boitel. Police quickly broke up the march. According to Antunez the police hit several of the protesters with clubs. Police held the 25 marchers in various police stations for several hours, eventually releasing them all without charges. Antunez was released after four hours.

¶4. (SBU) While Antunez was being detained, a mob organized by the local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution surrounded Antunez's house. At this time, Antunez's wife, Iris Perez Aguilera, was home alone. The crowd threw stones at the house, attempted to break a window to enter and walked on the roof.

¶5. (SBU) Police stayed on guard outside the homes of three of the five that they had detained the previous evening until about 5:00 PM on May 25, and prevented them from leaving. Police held two women from this group, Idania Yanes Contreras and Yestmy Elena Mena Zurbano, until 7:00 PM on May 25. Police told these two women that they would face charges for disobeying police orders and resisting arrest. These women

were the only ones in the group threatened with prosecution. Two protesters, Alejandro Gabriel Martinez Martinez and Amado Ruiz Moreno went to local hospitals and were put under observation for head injuries caused by being clubbed by the police. Both have been released. Although Martinez had indications of head trauma, he did not have a fractured skull as has appeared in some media reports.

¶6. (SBU) On the same day, May 25, several members of Ladies in White ("Damas de Blanco"), an organization of relatives and supporters of political prisoners, participated in a mass for Boitel at the church of Our Lady of Carmen in Havana. This activity took place without incident.

¶7. (C) Comment: Antunez boldly organized the Boitel commemorative march although he was one of the targets of a massive media campaign orchestrated by the GOC against the Cuban dissident community and USINT (See reftel). The GOC presented a document purportedly signed by Antunez acknowledging that he received funds from a Florida based foundations with ties to alleged "terrorist", Santiago Alvarez. Antunez is one of the few dissidents who continually takes risks by organizing sizable street protests. While several members of Cuban civil society fear a new wave of repression, it is clear that nothing short of being sent back to prison will deter Antunez.

PARMLY